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NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

**U.S. - RUSSIAN COOPERATION IN THE WAR AGAINST  
INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM**

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## U.S. - RUSSIAN COOPERATION IN THE WAR AGAINST INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

The September 11 attacks on the Pentagon and the twin towers of the World Trade Center elicited an unprecedented outpouring of Russian sympathy and expressions of Russian solidarity with the United States. Muscovites covered the lawn of the U.S. embassy with flowers and went to hospitals to donate blood. Russian President Vladimir Putin immediately sent a telegram of condolence to President Bush and was the first foreign leader to speak with Bush, reaching him by phone within hours of the attack. Although U.S. troops had been placed on heightened alert - a move which would have prompted Soviet Russia to respond in kind during the Cold War - Putin called Bush to assure him he would not add to already heightened tensions by increasing the alert status of Russian troops. Putin reaffirmed his commitment to U.S.-Russian relations in a phone call with Bush the following day, offering cooperation in the pursuit of the attackers. On September 13, Russian flags were lowered to half-mast and a moment of silence was observed in Putin's cabinet meeting and throughout the country. The NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council announced that "NATO and Russia are united in their resolve not to let those responsible for such an inhuman act to go unpunished. NATO and Russia call on the entire international community to unite in the struggle against terrorism. NATO and Russia will intensify their cooperation under the Founding Act to defeat this scourge." During a visit to Armenia on September 15, Putin stated that the recent attacks could "be compared in scale and cruelty to what the Nazis were perpetrating", perhaps implying that the U.S. and Russia should cooperate as they did in World War II to face a common enemy.

The declarations of Russian support for the U.S. in this time of crisis lend hope for improved relations with Russia, at least in the area of anti-terrorism. As the U.S. develops a strategy to protect our nation from future terrorist attacks and bring the planners of the September 11 attacks to justice, strategists should explore ways to further U.S.-Russian and NATO-Russian cooperation. Policy makers and military planners should assess the strategic environment and consider the following questions:

1. What common objectives could the U.S. and Russia pursue as we seek to protect our nations' citizens?
2. What elements of national power can Russia contribute to the effort to deter or thwart future attacks?
3. What are the opportunities and risks associated with U.S.-Russian cooperation in the fight against terrorism?

While U.S.-Russian cooperation in anti-terrorism is not new, these basic questions still require consideration. In the opening remarks to a Roundtable on Russian American Relations which convened at the Russian Cultural Center in Washington D.C. on December 16, 2000, then Under Secretary of State Thomas Pickering stated that "Threats to the safety and security of our people will come increasingly from trans-national, non-state actors, be they criminal mafia or terrorist networks. We are only beginning to understand how to work together to counter these new threats and have much work to do. But we are working closely together in Afghanistan on the Taliban as an operational aspect of our mutually shared outlook."

Both the U.S. and Russia have strong interests in ensuring the safety of their citizens, and both nations recognize terrorism stemming from militant Islamic fundamentalism as a common threat to these interests. In a syndicated column published in the Washington Post on August 14,

2001, Henry Kissinger discusses factors influencing post-Cold War international relations, and asserts that "on the political plane, the challenge of Islamic fundamentalism is probably the dominant Russian concern." Russian interest in countering militant Islamic fundamentalism stems from violent uprisings in the Russian republic of Chechnya and the potential spread of similar problems throughout Russia's sphere of influence in Central Asia. The Russian government has attributed the 1999 explosions in Moscow, which killed over 300 civilians, to the work of Islamic terrorists associated with the Chechen uprising. These violent acts coalesced Russian support for further military intervention in Chechnya. Vladimir Putin's handling of what has been called the second Russia-Chechnya war won high ratings from the Russian people, and appears to have been an important factor in his rapid rise to the Presidency.

Afghanistan is of special concern to the U.S. and Russia due to the presence of the militant Islamic fundamentalist group al Qaeda ("the Base"), which has been linked to violence in Chechnya and terrorist attacks against U.S. and Russian citizens. According to a special report published in the August 1, 2001 issue of Jane's Intelligence Review, al Qaeda is a conglomerate of groups with members spread throughout the world, operating as a network. Led by Osama bin Laden since its inception in 1988, al Qaeda numbers between 3,000-5,000 men, most of whom fight alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan against the Northern Alliance. The report states that Al Qaeda supports three types of groups - those fighting regimes led by Muslim rulers believed to be compromising Islamic ideals and interests (such as Saudi Arabia), those fighting regimes perceived as oppressing and repressing their Muslim populace (such as Indonesia), and those fighting regimes in order to establish their own Muslim state (such as Palestine and Chechnya). Additionally, bin Laden directs efforts and resources to fight the U.S., which is seen as a direct threat to Islam due to the presence of U.S. military forces in Saudi Arabia and U.S.

support for Israel. In a 1999 interview with TIME and ABC News journalist Rahimullah Yusufzai, bin Laden admitted to at least an indirect connection to attacks on Americans. Referring to the attacks on the U.S. embassies in Africa, bin Laden stated "Our job is to instigate (jihad against Jews and the Americans to liberate holy sites) and, by the grace of God, we did that... and certain people responded to this instigation". Regarding the killing of American soldiers in Somalia, bin Laden said he was pleased at the killings, and that they were achieved by "...the efforts of the mujahedin from among the Somali brothers and other Arab mujahedin who had been in Afghanistan before that." He also stated that it was his duty to try to acquire chemical and nuclear weapons, and expressed confidence that "Muslims will be able to end the legend of the so-called superpower that is America." In an October 2000 visit to New Delhi, Putin expressed support for a "consolidated front to combat terrorism" and made a thinly veiled reference to the role of al Qaeda in coordinating international terrorist attacks, stating, "I would like to share the absolutely trustworthy information with you that the same people are organizing terrorist attacks from the Philippines to Kosovo, Kashmir and Afghanistan and Russia's northern Caucasus."

It is clear from several U.N. Security Council resolutions and other public statements that both the U.S. and Russia view al Qaeda as a dangerous threat to their own national interests. The U.S. and Russia have criticized the Taliban militia, which exerts control over most of Afghanistan, for its support of Osama bin Laden. In 1999, the U.N. Security Council imposed sanctions on the Taliban for refusing to extradite bin Laden for trial on charges that he planned the deadly 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya. These sanctions, still in effect, involve a freeze on the Taliban militia's foreign assets and a ban on international flights by Afghanistan's national airline, Ariana. A related Security Council resolution calls upon states

to deny terrorists a safe haven or means of financing their operations, and to verify that asylum-seekers have not participated in terrorist acts before granting refugee status. In January 2001, the U.S. and Russia co-sponsored another U.N. resolution which added an arms embargo to the existing sanctions. A resolution detailing measures to enforce these sanctions was adopted unanimously by the Security Council in July 2001. The resolution established a five-member Sanctions Monitoring team based in New York to oversee sanctions enforcement, and a 15-member team to provide direct assistance to the six nations which border Afghanistan. The 15 member team will provide expertise in customs inspections, border security, and counter-terrorism. In response to the imposition of U.N. sanctions, the Taliban militia has declared the U.S. and Russia as enemies.

In addition to its efforts within the U.N. Security Council, Russia has taken a regional approach to coordinating anti-terrorism efforts, in an apparent effort to assert its leadership in economically weak former Soviet republics and strengthen diplomatic ties with China and India. In May 2000, members of the Commonwealth of Independent States Collective Security Treaty (Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan) created a rapid reaction force of approximately 2000 soldiers to fight potential insurgencies in Central Asia. In mid-June 2001, Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan formed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), adopting as one of their major aims improvement in the regional response to militant Islamic terrorism. The SCO agreed to establish an anti-terrorist center in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek and to support SCO members in their own areas of conflict.

While there appear to be good prospects for the U.S. and Russia to build upon the previous work of the U.N. Security Council and the SCO to further weaken, if not defeat, an enemy common to the U.S. and Russia, it is unlikely that future cooperation will involve combined

military operations. Despite the resolve of the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council "not to let those responsible for such an inhuman act to go unpunished", there are several constraints to U.S. and Russian cooperation in military operations in or around Afghanistan:

1. Over 15,000 Soviet soldiers were killed during the failed intervention in Afghanistan between 1979-1989. This memory is still fresh in the minds of many Russians, and the Russian government would probably find little public support for new troop deployments to Afghanistan.
2. The U.S. would presumably consider the lessons of the failed Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and rely more on air power and the deployment of Special Operations Forces than on larger, conventionally equipped ground forces. Perhaps the Russian Army Chief of Staff, General Anatoly Kvashnin, was considering this likelihood when he stated that "the U.S. has powerful enough military forces that it can cope with this task (revenge against the perpetrators of the September 11 attacks) on its own."
3. Since 1994, the Russian military has been trying to suppress the separatist movement in Chechnya. The apparent disregard for civilian casualties and the use of extortion, torture, and extrajudicial executions by Russian troops in this conflict has drawn criticism from numerous human rights groups, and may result in reluctance on the part of the U.S. to be associated with Russian military tactics.
4. The large number of Moslems in Russia (one in seven, according to a 19 September USA Today article by Bill Nichols) raises the possibility of further unrest within Russian borders if troops were to overtly attack the Taliban militia.
5. Russia needs to be prepared to provide military assistance to the Central Asian republics, particularly the members of the SCO, should fighting spread to their regions.



While it does not appear likely that combined U.S.-Russian military operations will be forthcoming, it is conceivable that Russia could aid the U.S. by helping to coordinate the forward basing of U.S. planes and support equipment in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and by putting pressure on the Taliban through support of the Northern Alliance, which is battling the Taliban for control of Afghanistan. Dr. Ariel Cohen, a Research Fellow in Russian and Eurasian Studies at the Heritage Foundation, stated in a September 14 report for [www.eurasia.org](http://www.eurasia.org) that "Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have all supported the Northern Alliance". Cohen states that the Alliance is dominated by ethnic Tajiks, and has most of its stronghold near the Tajik-Afghani border. According to a September 17 London Times article by Richard Beeston, Russia has based in Tajikistan 10,000 troops of the 201st Motor Rifle Division and 15,000 locally recruited troops under Russian command. Use of the locally recruited troops to aid the Northern Alliance would probably cause less concern among the Russia public than overt use of Russian troops. The Russian and locally recruited troops would also be useful in providing additional security for U.S. equipment and personnel based in Tajikistan.

Russia could also be valuable to the U.S. by providing intelligence support. According to Dr. Cohen, Putin has "reportedly ordered all intelligence information on ties between terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden... and the Taliban to be passed on to U.S. security officials." Mikhail Kreimer, head of the Collegium of Military Experts, an independent think tank in Moscow, was quoted in a September 15 Associated Press article by Deborah Seward as stating, "The most important support Russia can offer the United States is the creation of organizations which can coordinate the work of the intelligence services of different countries against terrorism to prevent attacks." Good intelligence will be necessary to identify and track members of al Qaeda and to dry up their sources of income, including opium smuggling. According to the

September 19 USA Today article by Bill Nichols, Russian Interior Minister Boris Gryzlov stated on September 17 that Russia was prepared to share intelligence on the location of certain terrorist bases and "the whereabouts of certain people." Thus, there is an opportunity to explore ways in which NATO and Russia can coordinate smoothly to use the informational instrument of national power (in the form of intelligence gathering) against a common enemy. Successful cooperation in this manner might have the added benefit of easing Russian concerns regarding the future enlargement of NATO, if Russia begins to see Western military intelligence as a potential asset instead of a threat.

The application of economic power to weaken terrorist organizations and their support infrastructure will be an important part of the strategy to defeat international terrorism. Russia and the U.S. have already begun cooperation in this area, through the sanctions and trade embargoes imposed on the Taliban by the U.N. Security Council. The U.S. and Russia should continue to lead the formulation of Security Council resolutions in this regard and should explore further ways to use economic power against supporters of terrorist organizations. The newly formed Foreign Terrorist Asset Tracking Center of the U.S. Treasury Department has had some initial success in this area, identifying 28 different entities associated with terrorism and freezing their financial assets in the U.S. Russia could contribute to this strategy by helping the U.S. identify, track, and freeze al Qaeda's financial assets in Russia and perhaps elsewhere in the former Soviet Union.

Due to the fact that terrorist cells are difficult to identify, track, and penetrate, the most effective means of eliminating Islamic fundamentalist terrorist cells may be to provide inducements to Moslem nations to police themselves. This approach will require diplomacy backed up by economic aid. Economic aid will also be necessary to reduce malnutrition among

the large numbers of refugees in Afghanistan and across its borders. In the near term, diplomacy backed up by economic aid does not appear to be a fruitful area for U.S.-Russian cooperation, due to the poor condition of the Russian economy. In the long term, however, this will probably be the most effective element of national power in attacking the root causes of militant Islamic fundamentalism. The desperation caused by extreme poverty and ruined economies must be removed, and this will probably require the financial resources of wealthier nations. Helping Russia strengthen its own economy could put them in a position to contribute foreign assistance in the future, and may help prevent insurgencies of the sort occurring in Chechnya.

Given these potential areas for cooperation in the application of military, informational, economic, and diplomatic power in the war on terrorism, the U.S. and Russia should pursue the following near term objectives:

1. Share intelligence on the identity, whereabouts, and plans of al Qaeda members, with the aim of capturing them or destroying their organization.
2. Share information on opium smuggling operations and other sources of income for al Qaeda, and coordinate efforts to cut off these sources.
3. Share information on the Taliban's "centers of gravity", with the aim of punishing them for harboring terrorist groups in Afghanistan. Continue to apply U.N. sanctions against the Taliban.
4. Coordinate with and offer assistance to neighboring countries of Afghanistan (Pakistan, China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Iran) in tightening their borders and making air bases available to the U.S., in hopes of bottling up and capturing al Qaeda members.

Cooperation in the pursuit of these objectives will not come without cost. While the U.S. and Russia have found common ground in our determination to counter the terrorist activities in Afghanistan, we have been at odds regarding conduct towards other nations suspected of sponsoring terrorism. Russia continues to sell arms to Iran and build a nuclear reactor for Iran in Bushehr (a potential source of material for nuclear weapons), despite ties between Iran and the Hezbollah in Lebanon. In his September 19 article in USA Today, Bill Nichols reports that Russian analysts believe Moscow is likely to seek U.S. consent to their dealings with Iran in exchange for cooperation in the effort to defeat al Qaeda and related terrorist cells. Other favors likely to be sought by Russia, according to Nichols, include:

1. easing U.S. criticism of Russian's campaign against the Chechen separatists,
2. forgiving \$48 billion in debts to Western governments, and
3. curbing U.S. plans to build a missile-defense system in violation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972.

While the U.S. cannot condone any support for the Hezbollah, the U.S. should mute its opposition to Russian-Iranian arms sales, given the newly emerging strategic environment. Concurrently, the U.S. should continue to reach out to moderates in the Iranian government, stressing our common opposition to the Taliban. While the potential spread of nuclear weapons to Iran is indeed troubling, the best approach at this time might be for the U.S. to work with Russia in identifying and formalizing procedures to account for weapons-grade nuclear material in Iran, rather than trying to block the construction of new reactors. In stating our position with respect to the Russian effort to suppress the Chechen separatist movement, the U.S. should acknowledge the gravity of a situation in which international terrorists may be active within Russian borders, but should continue to stress respect for human rights and the desirability of a

political settlement in Chechnya. Forgiving some amount of Russian debt would be appropriate, if Russia offers useful intelligence, substantial assistance to the Northern Alliance, and cooperation in the basing of U.S. troops in Central Asia. As stated previously, strengthening the Russian economy may help remove the root causes of militant Islamic fundamentalism within Russian borders, and would better position Russia to offer foreign assistance in Central Asia. U.S. plans to build a missile-defense system may well be taken off of the "front burner", as the Bush administration seeks increased funding for intelligence, troop deployments, and other issues associated with anti-terrorism. If this is the case, Russia will probably mute its objections to U.S. missile-defense plans and possible abandonment of the ABM Treaty. Nevertheless, there does not appear to be a pressing need for the U.S. to radically change its stance on ballistic missile-defense. Rather, the U.S. may be able to build upon trust engendered by U.S.-Russian cooperation in anti-terrorism and continue to work with Russia in defining a new strategic framework for nuclear deterrence and defense more appropriate for the post-Cold War era.

The terrorist attacks of September 11 may have helped to usher in a new era of closer ties between Russia and the United States. A relationship that in recent months has been dominated by distrust associated with U.S. missile-defense plans, NATO enlargement, and Russia's military tactics in Chechnya, can take a positive turn if the U.S. and Russia are able to shed mutual suspicion and cooperate effectively to defeat a common enemy. Due largely to its proximity to Afghanistan and its lingering influence on Central Asia, Russia is in a position to aid the U.S. and our NATO allies as we pursue the common objective of punishing the supporters of the September 11 attacks and eliminating international terrorism stemming from militant Islamic fundamentalism. Russia appears to be capable of making important contributions to the effort by sharing intelligence on the activities of the Taliban and al Qaeda and by using diplomacy to

garner support from Afghanistan's neighbors (particularly Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and perhaps Iran). Russia may also be able to use its military presence in Tajikistan to aid the Northern Alliance and protect U.S. troops that may be based there, and may be able to wield economic power by identifying and freezing assets of terrorist groups and their supporters. The U.S. can reach out to Russia and help strengthen their economy by working with European allies to forgive at least portions of Russian debt to Western governments. The U.S. should also reward Russian cooperation by recognizing the legitimacy of Russia's concern over the role of international terrorists in the Chechen separatist movement and by sharing intelligence with Russia regarding terrorist activities in Russia's sphere of influence in Central Asia. Defeating international terrorism will require a long term effort, but U.S. and Russian cooperation in this area is likely to result in long term benefits for both nations.